

CHAPTER 6

HOW THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WAS CREATED

*¹⁷ Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
2 Corinthians 6:17 (RSV)*

Anyone brought up in the Roman Catholic church is told that it is the “one true church” and that it began in the first century with apostle Peter as the first Pope and then an unbroken line of popes who came after him, each of whom inherited his absolute authority.

Certainly, when I was a teenager I pictured Peter as the Pope and other apostles like Paul as ‘cardinals’. In fact, that is a completely false picture of the Early Church and it was never like that. There were no such people as popes, cardinals, archbishops or even bishops, or at least not as they are now defined within Catholicism or even within other denominations. They didn’t exist.

Leadership in the Early Church was based *within* each local church. Other than the 12 apostles who were a unique one off group of men *who were not replaced in the next generation*, there were no leaders higher than the elders in each local church. There were differences in function i.e. what their ministry was, such as apostle, evangelist, prophet, Bible teacher, but no differences in levels of authority. Each house church governed itself.

There was nobody higher up who could send out instructions and orders from some regional or national ‘head office’. Each church was led by one or more local elders, usually two or three of them, and they were just mature men. That is what being an elder really means.

The Greek word for an elder is *presbuteros* and it really just means a *mature man*. However, the New Testament also uses another Greek word, *episkopos*, which is translated as *bishop* or *overseer*. But the point is these were *the very same men* as were called elders. It is just an alternative title or description for an elder, depending on which aspect of their role you are focusing on, i.e. their maturity or their function as overseers.

So, every elder was also called a bishop or overseer, keeping watch over the house church and providing leadership and teaching as a group of leaders within each house church. And, of course, they were all unpaid, unless they were gifted full time Bible teachers or if they were sent out far away as missionaries. The vast majority supported themselves by having a job, or they were retired men, and they led the house churches in their spare time, when they were not at work.

That is one reason why it was felt best to have a number of elders, not just one, so they would be able to share the workload given that they were not working for the church full time. So, each elder might only be able to put in 5-10 hours per week, or perhaps less, but taken together the 2, 3 or 4 elders combined could do more than 20-40 hours a week if need be.

That was how the churches of the first century all operated. They were small, they met in houses and the vast majority of leaders were not paid. Also, *decisions were made by the church as a whole, not by*

the elders. Indeed, this continued all the way through to the early 4th century when Emperor Constantine came to power.

He claimed to have been converted overnight from paganism to Christianity after allegedly seeing a vision of the cross in the sky after which he won a major battle for which he gave the credit to the God of the Christians. When this happened he effectively instructed all the pagans to join the churches. So, overnight, hordes of unconverted pagans came flooding into the churches, simply because they had been told to, or because they saw it as the way to get on in life, not because they believed the Gospel.

So, overnight the churches of the 4th century became a mixture of genuine Christians and unsaved pagans. The most genuine and discerning of the Christians refused to go along with any of this. So, they separated themselves from Constantine's new church and continued to meet in houses as they always had.

But many, and probably most, went along with this change, even seeing advantages in having the support of the Emperor, not least the ending of persecution. Therefore, they became part of the new model of church which was a syncretistic mixture of Christianity and paganism. They lacked discernment or their consciences were not strong enough, or they lacked the courage, to take a stand and refuse to compromise.

Moreover, now that the pagans were supposedly part of this new church, they began to meet alongside compromised Christians in the former pagan temples which they had used previously. So, all of a sudden, the churches were now meeting in large elaborate former temples rather than domestic houses.

And these former pagan temples became the model for what we still see today not only in the Catholic church but also all of the denominations, to one extent or another. You will surely agree that no church building you have ever seen looks like a domestic house. Even the plainest of them are large, even if they are not ornately decorated.

In addition to being contaminated by a huge influx of pagans and suddenly having a very different type of building, the changes Constantine brought in created other major differences from the Early Church. In particular, the much larger size of these new churches and the far higher numbers in the congregation meant they required full time paid leaders.

Therefore, we see the beginnings of the "*clergy class*" which was above the ordinary people. We also see them imitating the practices of pagan priests thereby introducing the concept of priesthood into Constantine's new church.

So, these new style leaders of churches were not only full time and paid. They also called themselves "*priests*". However, this priesthood which they claimed for themselves did not exist within the book of Acts or the New Testament letters. It was not even based on the Old Testament concept of priests, the ones who served in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The priests in the Catholic church were *based upon the pagan priesthood* which the new members of this church had always known from when they were pagans. Indeed, many of the men who took up these positions as priests in the new Catholic church had previously been pagan priests in the pagan temples.

This false new church quickly developed into an authoritarian, hierarchical arrangement with rulers rather than leaders, and all set out in a clear chain of command with the Pope, then cardinals, archbishops, bishops and then priests ruling over the people.

But now, by their new definition, a bishop was not just one of a group of three or four elders leading a small house church. To them, a bishop was one who ruled over a large 'diocese' containing very many local churches and therefore he was an exalted authority figure, not a servant.

Therefore, the whole problem of abusive, controlling, authoritarian leadership with church leaders dominating their congregations is traceable back to this catastrophic event in the 4th century. This not only affects the Catholic church but all other churches too which operate on a similar authoritarian, hierarchical basis.

The result is that many ordinary members are exploited and crushed by leaders, the very people who, in the biblical model, are meant to be their servants and protectors. I will not deal here with all the other pagan ideas and practices that entered into the newly formed Catholic church, as most non Catholic churches have dispensed with most of those.

So, it is primarily with the unbiblical structure, leadership model and emphasis on special church buildings and paid clergy that this book is concerned. That is because those errors have contaminated almost all churches, even if they have rid themselves of all the other doctrinal heresies of Catholicism.

When the Reformation came in the sixteenth century with men like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and later John Calvin, they were reasonably successful at eliminating false doctrines concerning heresies such as saints, Mary, purgatory, aural confession, indulgences and so on. But they almost all retained the Catholic model of church structure and leadership, albeit with minor adjustments. In particular, they kept the catholic invention of "clergy" and "laity".

So, they kept the model whereby one man is in charge, and he works full time, ruling over the church which meets in a special building, not homes, and with himself under the control of a hierarchical national leadership of all the churches in that denomination. In other words, they are the direct opposite of how the Early Church was structured and led.